**What is “Culture” anyway?**

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***“Culture, schmulture! People are basically the same around the world and I don’t need to know any ‘culture stuff’ as an American. They can learn my culture, right?”***

***Wrong!*** --from the book Cultural Intelligence… by Brooks Peterson

Dear Talbot:

Today we will explore the definition of “culture.” I will challenge your thoughts about culture and introduce you to a new way of thinking about it. Why is culture so important, you say? Before we take a look at what culture actually is, let’s see what YOU think it is! Take 10 minutes to read and complete this worksheet before we meet together for a culture exercise. If you don’t know, do not write “I don’t know”-- take a guess instead!

What is YOUR definition of “culture”? Write your definition on the paper provided by your teacher.

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An anthropologist is a scientist who specializes in study of the origin, the behavior, and the physical, social, and cultural development of humans. Here are two anthropologist’s definitions of “culture”:

***“The sum total of ways of living, including behavioral norms, linguistic expression, styles of communication, patterns of thinking, and beliefs and values of a group large enough to be self sustaining, transmitted over the course of generations.”*** F. E. Jandt, 2001

***“The ways in which people relate themselves to their physical and social environments and how they express these relationships.”*** I.E. Steglitz, 1993

**Now let’s explore what culture can look like in symbols.**

** (OR) **

**Is Culture like a Tree or an Iceberg?**

Dear Talbot,

Actually, culture can be like either one! Both analogies are accurate because there are aspects of culture that are very visible and aspects that are more difficult to perceive, almost hidden to the casual observer. Think of a tree: the trunk and the branches are obvious, but the roots of the tree are hidden from our view, under the ground. Although we can’t see them, we know they are there, because the visible tree can’t live without roots. Think of an iceberg: an iceberg does not float on top of the water, but there is much more beneath the surface; a mountain of ice, mostly imperceptible to the eye. Only a small portion of the iceberg rises above the water where it is visible. The visible portion of the iceberg would not be there if it weren’t for the supportive ice below it.

Culture is like both the tree and the iceberg. There are certain aspects of culture that are apparent and easy to spot (you can see, touch, hear, taste them), but there are also aspects of culture that are much bigger and that run deep beneath the surface, like roots of a tree and ice beneath the ocean. These are the aspects of culture that are the most important for you to be aware of in your host country. These cultural differences can mean the difference between success and failure!

Now that you are aware of the two different types of culture, you will try two exercises one on your own and one with a partner. .

**Ex. A: The Cultural Tree’s Attributes:**

**Concepts of Justice, Music, Architecture, Concepts of Beauty, Attitudes Towards Elderly, Celebrations, Language, Gender Roles, Food, Humor, Gestures…**

You should have received a copy of **The Culture Tree** from Profe Pickett or Frau Spring by this time. Take the following important aspects of culture above and write them either in the branches of the tree (very obvious cultural differences) or in the roots of the tree (not obvious cultural differences). When everyone is finished, Profe Pickett or Frau Spring will put up a key of The Culture Tree’s attributes (as well as many other additional attributes) so you can see how you did. Remember: do this exercise on your own

**Ex. B: The United States Iceberg**

Now let’s try another exercise, this time with the Iceberg Analogy. Profe Pickett or Frau Spring will now give you drawing of an empty iceberg. The portion ABOVE the water’s surface is like the branches of The Culture Tree. The portion BELOW the water’s surface is like the roots of The Culture Tree.

Here’s the catch: this is the United State’s Iceberg!

It’s time to brainstorm with a partner about what parts of American culture are obvious to all, and which parts are more difficult for foreigners to perceive.

Here’s an example of each: American’s participate in school sports (above the surface) and we value freedom (below the surface). Still having trouble? Think about concepts, values and attitudes BELOW the surface, and think of products or things you can perceive with your 5 senses ABOVE the surface. Try to fill in your iceberg with as many as you can think of! Your participation is worth 10 points and will be checked by Profe Pickett or Frau Spring.